

VERSAILLES OF THE POPES

By THÉODORE VAUCHER

We have become so used to reading about European cities being bombed that few names of places raided have stuck in the memory of the average newspaper reader. Yet one name did stand out last month: Castel Gandolfo. This summer residence of the Pope in the Alban Hills is not Italian territory: it is just as extraterritorial as the Vatican City. Hoping to find safety from Allied bombs in this place without military importance or military installations, 15,000 civilians sought refuge there. The world was shocked when in February Castel Gandolfo was raided three times from the air, more than 500 civilians being killed.

The following article describes the Castel Gandolfo of yesterday.—K.M.

CASTEL GANDOLFO: a name that evokes in the inhabitants of Rome the idea of holidays, of rest, of coolness; it stands for retreat into the Alban Hills, for flight from the heat. Emperor Domitian discovered the charm of these wooded hills; and today, in the gardens of the papal estate, one can still see the remains of the sumptuous villa which he built here, a villa almost as large as that of Hadrian near Tivoli and which was a regular town.

But not until the seventeenth century do we see the birth of the great tradition of papal reconstruction. Before Paul V, Castel Gandolfo was uninhabitable, but this Pope had the small lake of Turno drained, as its waters were poisoning the surrounding country with malaria. In this way, he prepared a place where his successors could come and spend the sweltering summer months. Urban VIII was the first Pope to start the fashion of country estates. When he was still Cardinal Maffeo Barberini, he built at Castel Gandolfo the villa which the princes of the Barberini family still occupy to this day. When he became Pope he commissioned his architects Carlo Maderna, Bartolomeo Breccioli, Domenico Castelli, and his great protégé Le Bernin to erect the papal palace, a beautiful palace in the French style which, however, does not have the magnificence of the other buildings of the seventeenth century. Great simplicity of line and an

atmosphere of intimacy and yet of grandeur make it the ideal residence for a sovereign pontiff. The large parks with their woods and flower beds, the profusion of statues, and the natural beauty of the site, have led the Romans to call Castel Gandolfo, somewhat pompously, the "papal Versailles."

With the Pope, his entire court and its functionaries settled in the Alban Hills for the summer. Princes and cardinals built smaller but just as magnificent villas. A summer resort gradually developed.

However, if Alexander VII embellished the garden and the palace, if Clement XI made frequent stays there on the advice of his famous physician Lancisi, other Popes neglected to go there. Pius VII had a large number of the statues which decorated the park moved to the gardens of the Quirinal. The most tempestuous years in the history of Castel Gandolfo began with 1798, the year when the French seized it. After the fall of Napoleon, the summer residences were used again till 1870. Pius IX was not very fond of the place. He used to go there, he would say, to meditate on death.

And then for sixty years it was deserted. The palace remained closed, wild grass invaded the park, and the whole estate took on that sad, mysterious air peculiar to empty houses.

The Lateran convention of February 1929 confirmed as papal property the palace of Castel Gandolfo, the Villa Barberini, and the Villa Cybo, which thus became part of the state of the Vatican City. The papal architects were entrusted with the work of uniting the three properties, making them into one. This was a considerable undertaking, since they covered an area larger than that of the Vatican City itself. It was necessary to renovate and repair the palaces and restore the gardens and the park, transforming everything with due regard to the works of the past by harmonizing the style of new constructions with that of the existing buildings.

The papal apartments at Castel Gandolfo are almost an exact replica of those of the Vatican. Many new constructions have arisen, for the requirements of a modern papal court are infinitely greater than those of even the most magnificent court of the past: garages had to be built, a power station, and a radio station which, incidentally, was used for experimenting with some of Marconi's discoveries in the field of wireless telegraphy. In the gardens, above hundred-year-old pine trees, rises the aluminum cupola of the new astronomical observatory.

To supply the papal court with food a model farm was established. The stables are spotlessly clean, airy, cool in summer and warm in winter, and they contain fine selected cows. In the poultry yard, one can see chicken of the most varied species. The water needed for watering the lawns is electrically pumped from the near-by lake. Ten kilometers of wide avenues make it possible for the motor-



cars of the Pope to travel around the estate. Rare plants enhance the beauty of the groves.

Within a few months a deserted hillside, where the undergrowth had swallowed up everything and where the hard volcanic rocks of which the Alban Hills are formed lay scattered everywhere, was transformed into one of the most superb residences imaginable. The site is unique: to one side, one's gaze looks out over the whole Roman countryside, stopping at the ruins of the aqueducts which break the monotony, then leaving the dome of St. Peter's to sweep out toward the sea, as far as Ostia, whose lights twinkle in the evening. Toward the other side, the view is less grandiose: it is picturesque and mysterious. Villages cling to the wooded flanks of the Alban Hills; and beyond, the two lakes of Nemi and Albano seem to be guarding a secret in their waters, which fill the craters of ancient volcanoes.

War and the Capelli Family

The following Red Cross report on the Capelli family of Naples is typical of the state of confusion reigning in Italy today:

The head of the family, Vittorio Capelli, is working in Germany as a mason; his wife Anna is recovering in a hospital in Naples from injuries received in one of the air raids on that city. The eldest son, Pietro Capelli, was taken prisoner in Tobruk and is now in a war-prisoners' camp in Canada. His brother Bruno was serving with the army group in Dalmatia which was disarmed by the Croats last autumn; he is now in Zagreb. Carlo Capelli, the third son, is fighting in a Badoglio division. Ugo Capelli, the youngest of the brothers—who has a German wife—has joined the Milanese detachment of the neo-Fascist militia. . . .